

# Make a Decision

By  
Michael J. Farlow, PhD

How many times have you been stuck in a meeting that was going nowhere? You look at your watch, doodle on your notepaper, make a list of things you need to do, and usually just want to get out of the room. You are waiting for a decision. So is everybody else, but nobody is willing to step forward and make one.

Progress by committee drives me crazy. Meetings have value as information exchanges or brainstorming sessions. But then, make a decision and get on with it!

I once had a senior-level direct report who was angry with me because I kept advancing people around him. My performance review for him noted that he “led” many meetings, most of which did not produce a decision or solution. My assessment was that he was so concerned about making a wrong decision that he made none. Instead, he chose the committee approach so that he could not be held accountable if a decision were wrong (but could take the credit if it were right). I told him he had to step up and be willing to risk being wrong now and then. But he couldn’t do it, and he was left in the dust.

In some cases risk may not be the issue; rather, it is the variety of potential options that becomes a trap. I am reminded of the Aesop fable of the fox and the cat. The fox bragged that he had many options for escaping from the hunter's hounds. The cat only had one. When the hounds came, the cat ran up a tree and hid while the fox couldn't decide on which option to employ and was caught.

I must admit that I have some of the fox's weakness in that many times there are so many choices, it is hard to pick one of them. I have learned through experience, however, that I have to place a limit on my decision time and fight the tendency to over-examine the issue. I force

myself to decide and move on. To some people this comes more easily; to others it requires work. I work at it. How about you?

### **Suggestions**

1. Listen to the pros and cons, and follow a process if you have one; but make your own decision. If you don't, others rule your fate and make it for you.
2. Set a time limit for yourself for making a difficult decision. When the time limit is reached, go with the best choice you have.
3. Break complex decisions into smaller segments that are more easily handled.
4. Be prepared to take a rational risk.
5. Forgo perfection. The 85 percent solution today will likely be better than a 99 percent solution six months from now.
6. Move on; don't second-guess yourself.
7. "Own" your decision; take responsibility for it.
8. Assess the results.
9. Learn from the experience.

Dr. Mike Farlow is the author of *Leaders are Made Not Born: 40 Simple Skills to Make You the Leader You Want to Be* ([www.leaders-are-made.com](http://www.leaders-are-made.com)). He is also a coach, trainer and speaker at Wolf Leadership Development, LLC. He works with executives and pre-executives who desire to increase performance and take their leadership skills to the next level. His specialty is improving performance at work by improving relationship behaviors required of successful leaders. Mike can be contacted at [mfarlow@wolfladership.com](mailto:mfarlow@wolfladership.com).